

86  
The true Terms of *Christian* and  
*Ministerial* Communion founded on  
SCRIPTURE alone.

A

# SERMON

By the late REVEREND

*Robert Craghead, M. A.*

---

WITH A

PREFACE:

CONTAINING

A short ACCOUNT of the AUTHOR,

BY

Mr. *ABERNETHY*.

---

D U B L I N :

Printed by S. POWELL,

For J. SMITH, at the *Philosophers-Heads*, on the  
*Blind-Key*. M DCC XXXIX.

THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD

STORM

1. October 1951



CONFIDENTIAL

CONT. LA. 311-12. INT. COCA. 31. 1. A.

MR. NORTON

W. I. C. V. D.

1900

1. *Chlorophyll a* (Chl *a*)



T H E

P R E F A C E.

*I*T has been usual to transmit with honour to posterity, the names of such as have been eminent examples of piety and virtue, or eminently serviceable to mankind, especially in the most useful professions. The generality of those who were well acquainted with the author of the following sermon, are of opinion his memory is justly intitled to this respect; and since the more common way of paying it, has not been taken, the publisher of the sermon thinks he has a fair opportunity for giving the publick a short account of that worthy person.

Mr. ROBERT CRAGHEAD was born in the year 1684. His father was Mr. Robert Craghead, a dissenting minister, who fulfill'd his ministry with great reputation for many years in the city of London-derry. After having spent some years in acquiring the knowledge of Latin and Greek at schools, in which his behaviour was always regular, and his proficiency very considerable, he applied himself dili-



gently to the study, first of philosophy, and then of divinity, in the universities of Scotland and Leyden; from whence returning to his own country, with an exceeding good character, both for his improvements in learning, and for probity and all virtue, he commenc'd a preacher; in which station he acquitted himself so well, fully answering the high expectations that had been form'd from his known abilities and excellent dispositions, that he was universally esteem'd, and soon invited to the joint pastoral care of a dissenting congregation in Capel-street, Dublin, where he was ordain'd in the year 1709.

This settlement plac'd him under a very publick observation, and there are many yet living who were witnesses how holily, and justly, and unblameably he behaved himself, even from the beginning of his ministry. His preaching was universally acceptable to the people of his own congregation, and others who occasionally heard him: Nor could it be otherwise, if they rightly valued what principally recommends a preacher to all wise and good men, solid useful knowledge, a clear apprehension, just notions of religion, and an excellent faculty of communicating them with the greatest plainness. But especially the truth and integrity of his good affections so naturally appeared in the unaffected simplicity and seriousness of his preaching, that his most attentive hearers will, I am persuaded, acknowledge, they could not help being convinc'd, that his words proceeded from the sincerity of his heart; that they were the genuine expressions of his inward religious dispositions and sentiments, and only intended to produce the same in others. This is the best character of preaching; it is the meaning of what St. Paul says concerning himself, as of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ \*.

“ We do not, as some others, accommodate our representations

\* 2 Cor. ii. 17.



“ *sentations of Christianity to low and private views, to a selfish interest, or that of a party; but from a full inward persuasion of the truth, we speak, as in the presence of God, without any other design than to persuade men to faith and obedience, that they may be saved.*” And, as that great pattern of Christian teaching elsewhere says, we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake \*. “ *We seek not our own worldly emolument, nor human applause, to be esteemed learned and eloquent; we do not use the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but set the truth in the clearest light we can, and re-present it with the greatest simplicity.*” Scarcely, I believe, did any man more sincerely endeavour to imitate this example than the person I am speaking of; or to preach the gospel with less affectation, less show of learning, of human wisdom and eloquence, less regard to popular applause, and with more charitable and pious affections, and more upright aims to win souls, and edify the body of Christ.

But whoever would be, as the apostle expresses it, an able and a successful minister of the New Testament, must teach by his actions as well as his words; and the respect due to the memory of deceased pastors, is not only on account of their speaking the word of God, but their exemplary conversation which they have happily finished. What the conversation was of the late Mr. Craghead, many in this city very well know; and that he was, even from his youth, an example of the believers in word, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and purity †. But it is not my intention to attempt the drawing of his character in all its parts. This is a kind of portraiture to which few are equal, and like most other works of  
genius,

\* 2 Cor. iv. 5.

† 1 Tim. iv. 12.

genius, though the execution be difficult, the purpose that is serv'd by it, is rather the entertainment of the mind, than the amendment of the heart. Indeed a perfect character, and, at the same time, an imitable one, would be of great advantage; and so much the greater, the more exactly and fully it were drawn; because, in that case, the minutest ingredient must be of absolute use towards forming the symmetry, dignity, and perfection of the whole: But, alas! this could not be a copy taken from the life! meer humanity can never, at least, in this first stage of it's existence, arrive to such honour, for

Nemo vitiis sine nascitur, optimus ille  
Qui minimis urgetur.

The character, however, which is here presented to publick view without any art or colouring, is, when necessary allowance is made for human imperfection, a truly amiable one; worthy to be had in affectionate remembrance; and as far from dishonouring, it sets our nature in a very agreeable light, I hope it will serve the useful purpose of exciting in others a desire of imitation: For these reasons I shall briefly mention, not all the virtues with which it was adorn'd, but some of it's more conspicuous and distinguishing excellencies; and the first is, that happy disposition of mind which is commonly called good nature. This is a temper rather than a particular affection; it diffuses a benign influence over all the passions, as it corrects that sourness, those petulancies of humour, and peevishness, which are the principal causes of disquiet in common life; so it greatly contributes to the preserving social enjoyment uninterrupted, by making all proper allowances to others on the score of human frailty; and is still employing the possessor of it in something humane or friendly, in some of those kind offices which plainly discover, that the good humour, satisfaction,  
and

and happiness of all around him, are as truly the natural objects of his desire, as his own happiness is. To this description the whole of Mr. Craghead's conduct was, in an uncommon measure, agreeable; the happiness of others made a large share of his happiness; and no sooner were the distresses of others known to him, than they became his distresses: Indeed, one could not long converse with him, without being inwardly convinc'd that he was a well-disposed benevolent man, for the law of kindness was in his heart, perpetually governing his tongue and his actions; which was the chief reason of his being so universally beloved, as he is very well known to have been, perhaps, no man more so, in his station of life. This is the soil wherein the lovely affections of compassion, friendship, and generosity, arrive to their proper perfection; here they grow almost without any culture; but here they are in danger of growing luxuriant; and, in order to their being retained in due subordination to the still more noble principles of a calm, impartial, universal goodness and rectitude of mind, by which the author of nature has plainly ordain'd them to be regulated; they stand often in need of a prudent and strict discipline, stricter, possibly, than this good man could, or other good men can, at all times, uniformly exert.

The same principle, improved by the doctrines and motives of the gospel, which this true believer heartily embrac'd, and form'd his temper and life by them, was exalted into Christian charity, the finishing part of a religious character. I need not take any pains to show the excellence of this virtue and how great stress the scripture lays upon it; and the truth is, there's little more need to bestow pains on convincing those who knew him well of his eminence in it. It appear'd by all the genuin fruits which the Apostles earnestly recommend, as most becoming the sincere Disciples of Jesus Christ, and the only sure foundation of  
peace



peace among them, by humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, patience, moderation and forbearance. It is too well known that, some years ago, a dividing spirit prevail'd so far among the protestant dissenters in the North of Ireland, as to break them into parties. Mr. Craghead could not possibly avoid being concern'd in their debates; but the part he took was that of a reconciler, which he discharg'd with such temper and prudence, that scarcely, I believe, did any minister stand so fair, and maintain so good an interest with both parties. And when the dissensions affected his own congregation, some of whom began to entertain jealousies concerning him, his behaviour on that occasion was so condescending and prudent as to preserve their peace, and he remain'd, to the last, in possession of their unabated respect, as on his part, a constant solicitude for the prosperity of their souls, was to his dying day, among the uppermost affections in his mind; scarcely did some of his friends, with whom he used the greatest freedom, ever visit him in his sickness, but the congregation of Capel-street was one subject of his conversation with them, how it should be provided for after his death, and what were the best measures to be taken for preserving its union and promoting it's edification.

Another excellent quality, conspicuous in him was Candor, than which what better, what more amiable can be said of any man? Every heart approves, every tongue applauds it, even theirs, who, thro' the influence of corrupt affections, are the farthest from it in practice. Not to speak of those abandon'd characters in which wicked dishonesty reigns, and whose conversation in the world is a continued series of dissimulation; we meet with some, I hope not bad men in the main, who always act with such savings and cautions, as if it were their design to keep themselves in the dark, and avoid being thoroughly understood,  
every

every action and every word, besides the natural plain meaning, has some secret concealed view; they seem to study an art in conversation, and to value themselves more upon policy than sincerity. 'Tis true, the wisdom of the serpent, is commendable in conjunction with the simplicity of the dove: but of the two, 'tis not difficult to judge which is of the most immediate importance to a good state of mind. The former is ornamental to a religious and virtuous character, but only so far as it consists with the other, which lies nearer the very life and being of true goodness. Now upon this head, I appeal to all his intimate friends, whether they did not observe in the whole conduct of the worthy person I am speaking of, such a virtuous, such a noble, undesigning openness as was most worthy of esteem? did they ever see any artful management, unbecoming the strictest ingenuity, or hear from him words of a doubtful meaning, and which might designedly lead the hearers into a mistake, or conceal a selfish Intention? I know some who frequently convers'd with him, always found their minds agreeably struck with the plainest marks of his probity and candor, and at perfect ease, as in the company of an unsuspicious and unsuspected friend.

Among the praise-worthy qualities already mention'd, and as strictly connected with them, his remarkable modesty and self denial, very well deserves a place. He seems to have made it a part of the constant discipline of his mind to think severely of himself and favourably of every one else. For, notwithstanding his being inferior to few in intellectual abilities, improv'd by a liberal education, his lowliness of mind and esteeming others better than himself, made him choose to appear as a learner when he was the fittest to teach. This, tho' it sometimes prevented his being so useful a companion as otherwise he might have been, made him at all times a most agreeable one; but what renders it particularly worthy of being

b

here

here taken notice of was it's proving, as 'twas very natural it should, an excellent preparative for that generous indulgence, and those charitable sentiments which he took pleasure in testifying towards those who differ'd from him in some points of religion.

Humility was, in him, a moral virtue, far remov'd from that abjectness of mind, which neither dares, nor cares to exert it's rational powers in examining and judging of matters, wherein above all others, an inward consent and personal perswasion are most essentially requisite. His good understanding easily discern'd that as the excellency of religion consists in it's being a reasonable, so it's acceptableness to God must entirely depend on it's being a voluntary service, neither of which can in any degree, be compatible with an implicit subjection to the authority and decrees of fallible men: for which reason he zealously stood fast in the liberty wherewith, God the author of his nature, and Christ, the author of his religion, had made him free. But it was too gross an absurdity to find a place in his modest ingenuous mind; what pity, 'tis it should any where be found, to refuse that right to others, which with manly resolution he vindicated to himself. He called no man master or father upon earth, nor would suffer in himself any thing that look'd like assuming such superiority over other Christians; that amiable equal relation of brethren which Christ establish'd among his disciples, as alone suitable to the genius of his gospel, and the dignity of the rational mind, was perfectly adapted to the bent and disposition of his heart. He had a consciousness, in common with the rest of mankind, of the narrow limits, and other manifold imperfections of the human capacity, but had an honesty superior to most men, in making open acknowledgments of these imperfections, and in acting consistently with such acknowledgments: " it would ill become him (he would often say) who " was every day meeting with mortifying instan-



“ ces of weakness and error and ignorance in himself,  
 “ to set up his understanding as the measure of truth  
 “ and error to other men.” That these were the  
 prevailing sentiments and dispositions of his mind, the  
 following sermon plainly shows, and what his judg-  
 ment, after diligent inquiry and mature deliberation,  
 was concerning the terms of Christian and ministerial  
 communion. It was preached about three years ago,  
 to a very large audience in his own Meeting-house,  
 and, no doubt, many very well remember it. And to  
 show that he continued in the same sentiments, with  
 an earnest zeal to have them propagated, as the true  
 and stable grounds of Christian concord, he did a lit-  
 tle before his death, of his own meer motion, and with-  
 out being solicited by any person, put it into the hands  
 of a near relation of his own, with express directi-  
 ons that it should be publish’d, which accordingly is  
 now done, from his own manuscript, without any  
 alteration.

What now, was it naturally to be expected, should  
 be the end of such a conversation, of a life spent in  
 endeavouring to promote what was the very design of  
 Christ’s coming into the world, glory to God in the  
 highest, on earth peace, and good-will towards  
 men, of a religion consisting in love, joy, peace,  
 righteousness, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness,  
 faith, temperance, in which, he who serveth Christ,  
 is acceptable to God, and ought to be approved of  
 men? Certainly that it should be calm, peaceable and  
 joyful, and so it was: a good foundation was laid  
 up in store against the time to come, and nothing  
 remain’d but to lay hold on eternal life. This good  
 man in his last illness, which was lingering, and for  
 some time frequently chang’d it’s appearances, giving  
 occasion alternately to the hopes and fears of his friends  
 concerning the event, preserv’d an uniform, quiet  
 resignation to the will of God: at last when he saw  
 death approaching, he met it without fear, as an  
 enemy

enemy that had lost it's sting, nay with the triumphs of a conqueror, over the grave. With a chearful heart he bid adieu to this world, "to all the change-able scenes of time, and all that was desirable in life, and made death welcome as the messenger sent to bring him into the immediate presence of his God and Father, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he had faithfully serv'd." He died July the 30th. 1738. in the 54th. year of his age.

The



The true Terms of *Christian* and  
*Ministerial* Communion founded on  
SCRIPTURE alone.

A

S E R M O N.

PHILIP. iii. 15, 16.

*Let us therefore, as many as be perfect be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.*

**T**HE *Christian* Church was establish'd at first upon the best foundation that any such Society ever was. There were, particularly, so many excellent rules laid down, and such provision made for preserving peace and concord among it's members, as one would have thought abundantly sufficient to secure and perpetuate them. The event, nevertheless, proved otherwise. It was not long that *Christians* continued united among themselves. No sooner was there a handful of the *Gentiles* converted to

B

the



the *Christian* faith, but their elder brethren, the christianiz'd *Jews*, began to impose, and lay burdens on them which they had no right or warrant to do. They would needs compel them to be circumcised, and to observe the law of *Moses*, in order to their being admitted to communion and fellowship with them. The *Gentiles*, who had a better understanding of their *Christian* liberty, would by no means yield to such an imposition: And this was the occasion of sharp debates between the contending parties, which, as far as we can judge, did not wholly subside 'till the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and with it the abolishment of the whole *Jewish* polity. This good, however, came of their contention, it gave the apostles an opportunity to explain what their lord and master had before taught concerning this matter, and to add such other canons or rules as the present exigency requir'd, and which might be fitly applied to all other cases of the like nature that might at any time fall out in the *Christian* church.

By the blessing of God, the endeavours of the apostles, providence also concurring with them, became effectual; the controversy was at length brought to an end, and, for a considerable time after, the churches, though they were often expos'd to severe persecution from their enemies, enjoy'd a happy union among themselves. Happy had it been for them, and for us all, had that still subsisted! — But it did not. — In process of time there arose among them men of an assuming imperious temper, who, like *Diotrephes*, affected the pre-eminence, and would needs lord it over their brethren; endeavouring to impose their own tenets and opinions on them, as terms of *Christian* communion, and, in case of non-compliance, not scrupling to excommunicate and cast them out. This prov'd especially true after they had got a  
taste

taste of worldly riches and power: They began then, in good earnest, to thunder out their anathemas against each other: Synods and councils were call'd, chiefly, if not only, one would think, for this very end. Anti-synods were again call'd by the adverse party to counteract what the other had done; and very frequently they did this about very trifling controversies, insomuch, that at length the most minute difference in judgment, or practice, became an occasion of strife, and sometimes even of excommunication itself. Who would have thought, after the express decision the apostle *Paul* had made about the observance or non-observance of days, that that should at any time after prove a matter of dissention? And yet in fact it is true, the eastern and western churches did in a solemn manner excommunicate each other on account of a difference between them concerning the time of celebrating the festival of *Easter*; and to this day, the observing or not observing such days continues to be a subject of strife among many.

Certainly this dividing spirit among *Christians*, and their readiness to cast out each others names as evil, can never be sufficiently lamented, can never be too often, or too warmly exposed. Every attempt, therefore, to remedy so great an evil, and to beget in men a better temper, should be encourag'd by all who wish well to the *Christian* cause: Because, if there was no other evil in our unnatural divisions, 'tis certain they give infidels one of the most plausible handles, and put one of the most formidable weapons into their hands that can be us'd against us.

Now, when this unnatural state of *Christians* comes to be attentively considered, I cannot help thinking it will be found, that one of the principal causes of it has proceeded from their departing,

ing, in a less or greater degree, from that one rule which God hath given them, and their setting up other rules to themselves to walk by, other tests of orthodoxy, and other terms of communion than what are therein contain'd and held forth ; and in proportion to the degrees of their departure from thence, and the variety, or number, of other rules set up in it's place, the divisions, which have thereupon happen'd, have been attended with less or more mischievous consequences. I will endeavour, at this time, to make an honest effort to bring men back to that one rule, and to confirm them in their adherence to it, as the only rule of all reveal'd religion, or the only standard of *Christian* faith, which, how weakly soever it may be perform'd, yet if it be well and honestly intended, can never be ill taken by any sober thinking *Christian*. It is with this view I have made choice of these words for the ground of what I have at present to say. *Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, &c.* In speaking unto which, I shall

1<sup>st</sup>, Consider what we are to understand by the rule here referr'd to, and what use *Christians* ought to make of it, especially with respect to the preserving of peace and union among themselves.

2<sup>dly</sup>, I shall from hence take occasion to shew you, that tho' *Christians* may be otherwise or differently minded, *i. e.* may think differently from one another about some religious points, yet that lays no just foundation for a breach of communion among them, nor for any hard or ill treatment of the one from the other.

Lastly,



*Lastly*, I shall make some practical application and improvement of both with respect to ourselves.

I. Let us consider what is to be understood by the rule here referr'd to, and what use *Christians* ought to make of it, &c. Some Commentators are of opinion the Apostle does not here speak of the common general rule of faith given to all *Christians*, but of one particular canon contained in it, namely that which he himself had laid down in reference to the controversy between the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, hinted at, they say, in this passage, and more plainly deliver'd, *Gal.* 3. 15, 16. where he professedly treats of the same subject. *In Christ Jesus*, says he, *neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth any thing, but only a new creature; as many as walk according to this rule peace and mercy be upon them.* And a most excellent comprehensive rule it must be own'd to be, than which nothing could be more pertinent, or better adapted to end the controversy then on foot; nor can any thing be more fitly said to adjust all controversies of the like nature which have happened among *Christians* since. It is certain the end and scope of all religion, and of the *Christian* religion, in particular, is to make men new creatures, which signifies, in other words, to make them virtuous, holy, wise and good, and by that means to render them compleatly and forever happy. Wherever therefore this end is answer'd, wherever men are made such new creatures, in them the end and law of christianity is fulfill'd; and consequently among such, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, nor any other controversies of the like nature, should be look'd upon as availing any thing, at least they should never

never avail so far as to occasion an alienation of affection or a breach of communion among them. Here we may safely and warrantably set our foot, and with confidence determine (for the Apostle under the conduct of the Holy Ghost has done it before us) that wherever men are, by the grace and influence of the Gospel, made new creatures, they may, they ought, whatever remaining differences may subsist between them, they ought, I say, to walk and live together as brethren, maintaining the most intimate communion and fellowship with one another.

If it be thought that the rule here spoken of should not be limited to that canon of the Apostle just now taken notice of, but extended farther to the general law and rule given to all *Christians*, I will proceed to consider it in that light also. And would observe in the first place, and I do it with pleasure, that in this matter all the *Reform'd* are, in profession at least, happily agreed. They all concur in taking the holy scripture, and nothing but it, for that rule: They are all agreed in contending against the *Papists*, that it is a clear and perfect rule, and that it is so independently of unwritten traditions, and of fathers, councils, &c.

It is certain we cannot, without thinking very dishonourably of the wise and good governor of the world, look upon any revelation coming from him but as perfect in it's kind, *i. e.* as perfectly sufficient to answer the end proposed by it; which end can be no other than to render men holy, wise, good and happy, and to direct them to the proper means whereby that end can best be answer'd. We cannot, I say, imagine, that God would grant a revelation to men which was not fully sufficient for that end, and that without any additional supplements or amendments to be made thereunto

thereunto by fallible uninspired men: The scriptures are therefore said to be *able to make us wise unto Salvation, and to render the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnish'd unto all good works.* For the same reason it must be granted, that such a revelation must be so clear and plain, in all things necessarily requir'd upon our part in order to our obtaining that end, that no honest impartial inquirer, if he uses due and proper means, need be mistaken about them. To suppose the contrary is to suppose both parts of a contradiction to be true, *i. e.* that the Holy Scriptures are not a revelation of God's will made to us: for, on the one hand, if they cannot be understood by all diligent, impartial inquirers after truth, (still meaning as to all things necessarily requir'd of us in order to Salvation) they cannot be call'd a revelation of God's will to us at all; and yet in the supposition, it is granted, and it must be so, that they are.

Well then, is it agreed that the word of God is in itself, and ought to be receiv'd by us, as such a clear, full and perfect rule? I would ask then, why it may not be allowed to be the proper external medium or center of union to all true *Christians*, who sincerely own and adhere to it as such? Or whether such their adherence to it should not be look'd upon as laying a sufficient foundation for their living together in *Christian* communion? One would think this cannot consistently be deny'd by any who take it for their rule, and their only rule.—If it should, I would fain know what other foundation can be laid, what else is it in which *Christians* can possibly unite, I mean as to their external profession and communion one with another; and if we once depart from it, when, and where, and how shall we be able to make a proper stand?—If it be said it is not the words



words of Scripture but the sense of scripture in which *Christians* ought to unite, I grant it. But then, either the words of Scripture are sufficient to convey to us the sense of scripture, or they are not. If they are, we are just where we were, the words of scripture and the sense of scripture must go and stand or fall together. If it be said they are not sufficient to convey the sense of scripture to us; will they, who are of that opinion, tell us what is next to be done? Union and communion should be maintain'd among *Christians*. There is nothing more peremptorily requir'd in all the new testament: And how shall it be effected? If it be said, the scripture may be interpreted, and the true and genuin sense of all important points collected out of it. This also shall be readily granted; and I will add, that this may be done very profitably and to great advantage. It is or should be the daily work of ministers thus to expound the scriptures to their people. But what if some should make a false exposition of scripture? Or what if there are some sincere *Christians*, who, not being able to see with our eyes, cannot therefore be perswaded implicitly to take for granted our interpretations to be true; but will take a liberty to see with their own eyes, and judge for themselves? ——— What is to be done with them? ——— Have we, has any man, or body of men a right to impose their interpretations of scripture on them, and to reject them as unworthy of *Christian* communion if they will not comply? Show us where such an authority is lodg'd, show us the man or men who are invested with it, and I will undertake, the whole cause of *Christian* liberty, for which some have been so zealously, and I think gloriously, contending, shall be at once given up. ——— But if no such thing can be made appear, as I am most confident it never will,

will, I, for my part, know no other way or course that possibly can be taken, but to admit to communion all such sincere *Christians* as own and adhere to the scripture as the only rule of their faith and manners, and who in their lives and conversation give the proper evidences of their having complied with the terms of salvation therein required, even tho' they should in several points entertain different Sentiments from us and from one another. This therefore leads me to the

II. General head, which is to shew you, that tho' *Christians* may be otherwise or differently minded, *i. e.* may think differently from one another about some religious points, yet that lays no just foundation for a breach of *Christian* communion among them, nor for any hard or ill treatment of the one from the other.—In this we have the Apostle *Paul* for our authority and guide. He plainly supposes that some both among the *Jewish* and *Gentile* converts were sincere *Christians*. How else could he say that God had received them? How else could he so earnestly press them to continue in *Christian* communion and fellowship with each other? And yet it is no less evident that they differ'd very widely about some things. He supposes the one was otherwise minded than the other, and that they had not attain'd to the same or a like degree of knowledge and understanding. Indeed such differences both in judgment and practice have been common in all ages of the church, and even supposing men on both sides to be sincere, are to this day every where to be met with. They are the unavoidable consequence of that weakness and imperfection which at present cleave to us. Some have much greater capacities, much clearer heads, and are of a much more penetrating genius than others.

C

Some

Some have had the Advantage of a liberal and instructive education, others happen to be brought up in great ignorance, and perhaps under the influence of great and powerful prejudices. Some have much better opportunities, much more time and leisure for improving themselves in religious knowledge than others, whose lot and circumstances in the world oblige them to spend the greatest part of their time about secular affairs.

— On all these accounts it is not to be wonder'd at, it is scarce possible to be avoided, that there should be a great diversity of sentiments among men in such matters, and that some should attain to a much more perfect and thorough knowledge of them than others. Such as do so are those whom the Apostle elsewhere calls *Strong*, and in the words of the text he calls them *perfect*.

Here I would ask again what is to be done in this case? how is it that such men are to behave toward each other? What must the strong and perfect, or those who think themselves so, do with those who are otherwise minded, and whom they therefore look upon as weak and imperfect?

— Before this question comes to be directly answer'd, I would beg leave to shew you in the first place what I apprehend ought not to be done with them.

They ought not to be depriv'd of their right and liberty to judge for themselves.

They should not be hinder'd to make an open profession of their sentiments, and to defend them in the best manner they can.

They ought not to be excommunicated and cast out because of them.

Much less, in the last place, should they be persecuted, or in any wise punish'd on account of them.

They



They ought not, I say, to be depriv'd of their right and liberty to judge for themselves. The Apostle *Paul* had much better pretensions to judge for others in matters of religion than any who have since succeeded him; and yet we find he did it not, but left every man, with respect to the great controversy of his time, to be guided by the perswasion of his own mind. By parity of reason, things, without doubt, should be left on the same foot with respect to all other controversies of a like nature. If we think men in the wrong, we may by scripture and reason, convince them, if it be in our power; but till they are convinc'd, it is inhuman and unchristian to compel them to act contrary to their convictions; nor should we tempt, or so much as wish them to do it, even supposing it done without our influence or sollicitation. I would not, for example, upon any consideration, entice a poor *Papist* to eat meat on any of their fasting days, as they call them, nor could I wish to see him do it, provided I had reason to believe he was, at the same time, perswaded in his own mind it was not lawful for him. Indeed the main complaint we have against the *Papists* is, that, in these and other matters of religion, they will not allow men such a liberty to judge for themselves, nor to act according to that judgment. But to me nothing can be more evident, than that this liberty is one of the most essential unalienable rights of human nature, which no man, nor body of men have authority to deprive us of; nor are we our selves at liberty to make a surrender of it. To talk of a publick and a private conscience, and to affirm, as some have done, that the latter ought to be yielded and given up to the other, is to make man, and not God, Lord of our consciences, and would be in effect the destruction of all religious liberty.

As men ought not to be depriv'd of a liberty to judge for themselves, neither should they be hinder'd to make an open profession of their sentiments, and to defend them in the best manner they can. The one without the other would be no great advantage to any man. What would it signify to me to have liberty to think and judge for myself, (which, in the nature of things, it is absolutely impossible to deprive a man of) if I had not, at the same time, liberty of making a profession of what I take to be the truth, and of acting accordingly? I speak only in reference to points that are purely of a religious nature: for as to such as affect civil government and society, or which have a tendency to disturb the publick peace, there is no doubt the magistrate has a right to interpose, and lay men under proper restraints. But in reference to the other, none should be hinder'd to declare and defend their principles, and to act according to them. The apostle bids us *prove all things, and hold fast that which is good*: but how can we try, *i. e.* examine all things, if men have not a liberty to speak their minds? Superstition and tyranny may be supported by stopping men's mouths, and tying up their hands: But truth needs no such supports. The more it is examin'd and sifted, the brighter it still shines, and the greater liberty men have to debate controverted points, always provided they do it in a fair and candid manner, they are in the more likely way to find out at length on which side the truth lies. I would fain know what would have become of *Christianity* it self, if, when it was first published to the world, either the church then in being, or the civil magistrate had a power *de jure*, to hinder men from declaring, professing, and defending their principles.

But

But it is not barely a toleration that is due to such——We have no right to excommunicate and cast them off, merely because they do in some things entertain different sentiments from us. Sincere *Christians* thus may differ; and sure, one would think, no man, as you have heard, who is a sincere *Christian* himself, would dare to treat another, of the same stamp and character, after such a manner. I have already observ'd, that in all those things which the scriptures themselves insist on (I will not say the same as to all that men may insist on) as necessary terms of our acceptance with God now, and our eternal Salvation at last, they speak so clearly and plainly, that no honest impartial enquirer need be at a loss. In other things good men may, and in fact do, think very differently. It has been so from the time there was such a thing as a *Christian* church, and, in all probability, it ever will be so 'till the day come, that, in God's light we shall see light; when, the veil being perfectly taken off our hearts and eyes, we shall no longer *see darkly through a glass, but face to face, and know even as also we are known*. 'Till then we must make the best we can of things. There seems to be no other way left, but to *bear with, and receive one another, even as God for Christ's sake receiveth us*. Indeed, if God did not, in such cases, deal more favourably with us, than we often incline to deal by one another, there are many among us would have but little hope or expectation from him.

The apostle, in all the passages where he treats of this subject, evidently supposes, that in his time there were such differences among true and sincere *Christians*: And what does he direct concerning it? Does he advise one party to excommunicate or cast out the other? No such thing; but on the contrary uses all his endeavours to reconcile



concile and unite them, strongly advising them to continue in *Christian* communion and fellowship, notwithstanding their different Sentiments.

Indeed it has never been well with the church of God since the excommunicating trade, on pretences of such a nature, first began; nor, in all appearance, will it ever be, 'till, in his good providence and time, there be an end put to it. The excluding canons which men, through a lust of power, (I cannot think of it otherwise) have from time to time enacted, and their denouncing anathemas against their brethren, often better men than themselves, for not complying with the unscriptural laws and terms which they thought fit to prescribe, have done infinite mischief to the cause of religion, and of *Christianity* in particular. Instead of bringing men to uniformity, which has always been the fam'd pretence for enacting and enforcing them, the consequence has ever been to set the contending parties at a greater distance from each other, and to beget a farther estrangement and alienation of affection between them. By this means the body of *Christ* has been crumbled into numberless parties, all, or most of them, keenly set against one another, on account of the excommunicating canons and unscriptural standards insisted on by most of them, and which serve just as so many partition walls to keep them from coming together.—Since *Christ* himself thought fit to break down the middle wall of partition between *Jews* and *Gentiles*, it ill became any of his followers to set up other walls of partition in its place——This, in a word, is the principal source of all the animosities and divisions, which have happened from the beginning to this day.——Lord when shall there be an end of them! O let not the eyes, let not the expectations of thy poor servants, who pray night and day for the  
peace

peace of God's *Jerusalem*; fail while they wait for this great salvation of thine.

Now if *Christians* should not excommunicate *Christians*, because they do in some things think differently from them, much less, in the last place, should they distress and persecute one another on that account. This is the last effort of bigotry and blind zeal. When anathemas and curses will not do, then follows persecution, in order to make the other effectual. The civil magistrate must be call'd in to do the priest's drudgery for him, and render his sanctions formidable: and very formidable to be sure they are, when they come attended with the bloody executioner at their heels, or when a man knows beforehand he must either yield or burn. What dreadful havock and devastation this has made in the world, none, who knows the history of it, need be told.

It is, indeed, very strange it should ever enter into any one's head, that persecution is a proper means to make men religious, or to convince them of what they were not before, or otherwise convinced of; unless it be, that there are men in the world so blind and wicked as to speak and act wickedly even for God. Is religion a thing of such a nature, that men, by external violence and force, may be compell'd to it? Or can a man's mind be convinc'd by any other method than by rational or demonstrative evidence? Or will cruelty to, and hard usage of men's persons, make them think the better of us, and of the principles profess'd by us? Will they not on the contrary, make them detest and hate us, and, it may be, our principles for our sakes? At least, this is what persecution has a natural direct tendency to. To what purpose then is it us'd? Or what end can be answer'd by it, unless it be to make men hypocrites?

crites? And, indeed, this effect it often has, *i. e.* it makes men say and profess they believe what really, and at heart, they do not believe. It may make them fall down and worship their persecutors, as it is storied some barbarians do the devil, when in their hearts they abhor them. It is certain, religion must be a matter of a man's voluntary choice, otherwise it is not religion at all; and conviction must flow from evidence, otherwise it cannot be called conviction. Nothing, therefore, upon the whole, can be more contrary to all sense and reason than persecution. And, surely, I may add, that nothing can be more contrary to the whole scope and genius of the gospel. *Christ's* kingdom is not of this world, and therefore the engines and terrors of this world ought never to be made use of, either for supporting or promoting it.

By this time, I presume, the way is pretty well prepar'd for giving a direct answer to the above-mention'd question: And from all that has been said, no other determination, I think, can be made, but what has been before suggested, namely, That all true *Christians* who hold fast the head *Christ Jesus*, and continue firm in their adherence to that one rule of faith and manners which he hath given us, ought, notwithstanding any remaining differences among them, to live in *Christian* communion and fellowship with one another. To this purpose, as has been already observed, we have the exprefs decision of the apostle *Paul*, over and over repeated, in relation to the controversy between the converted *Jews* and *Gentiles*; for proof of which 'tis perfectly needless to mention particular texts, because his whole discourse upon the subject, and a great deal he says about it in almost all his epistles, has no other end, drift, or tendency. And, if what he has determin'd in that



that case is, as without doubt it should be, extended to all others of the like nature, that is, in plain terms, to all other religious controversies which sincere *Christians* have among themselves, nothing can be more manifest than that the point I have all along been endeavouring to prove must be true. Indeed, if any are to be excluded from communion, they, and they only, are the men, who would obtrude their own dictates, or tenets, (or, which is the same thing, who adopt creeds, articles, and confessions, made by others, and would impose them) as terms of *Christian* communion; such men have ever been the troublers of the church of God; and to them we never should give place, no not for an hour.

In a word, *other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ, in whom, as you have heard, neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, availeth any thing, but only a new creature.* I therefore say it again, (and because I would gladly leave an impression of it on your minds, I hope the repetition will be excus'd) wherever we find men, professing the *Christian* religion, made such new creatures; wherever we find men, who, in a judgment of charity, we have reason to look upon as true fearers of God, and believers in our Lord *Jesus Christ*; whoever they be who love *Jesus Christ* in sincerity, and who manifest that sincerity by keeping his commandments; whoever they are that walk uprightly, and work righteousness, who *do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God*; or, in other words, *who live soberly, righteously and godly in the world*; (and may it not be said, without offence, there are such, many such, I hope, in all the churches) wherever, I say, such men are to be met with, they should, without being oblig'd to give any other, or farther, proofs of their soundness in the faith, be made welcome, heartily welcome to us; they should,

D

how-

however they may in other things be otherwise minded, be to us as the excellent ones of the earth, and in them should be all our delight.

After all, how plain soever this matter appears to be, it is a point which will not go down with some. There are, and, almost, always have been, men weak and ignorant enough to stand up for other, or different, terms of communion than, so far as we can judge, *Christ* and his apostles ever thought of. And, by the way I cannot but observe, that the more weak and ignorant *Christians* are, they are the more apt to set up their own sense of things as a standard to others. The *Jews* are all along suppos'd by the apostle to be the weaker sort of *Christians*, and yet they were, in this matter, the chief imposers. The *Gentiles* might be faulty in despising them too much; but, in relation to the controversy itself, the principal thing, we hear, they did, was strenuously to withstand their impositions.——It is too plain, that the part the *Jews* acted then, has been acted over and over again in the *Christian* church since. There are and have been men, as I said, who, not content with an undisturbed liberty to judge for themselves, to profess and assert their own principles, and to walk and act according to them, not content, I say, with all this, they have claim'd a privilege to set up other standards of faith than the holy scriptures, and impose their own sentiments in religious matters, under no less a penalty than dismissing or excluding men from their communion, which is the highest penalty that *Christians*, as such, have a power of inflicting.

One would wonder what can be said in defence of such a conduct.——I will endeavour, as briefly as I can to let you see, and at the same time give, what I take to be, a proper answer.

One thing they plead for their conduct is this — They take it for granted their principles are true, being founded on the word of God, and consequently, that they, who differ from them, must be in error. — From whence it is thus argued: — If, say they, we should admit such erroneous persons into our communion, it would be a means to harden them in, and we ourselves must appear as approvers of, and become accessories to, and partakers with them, in their errors.

To which I return this short answer, that the conclusion can by no means be collected from the premisses. — Surely the apostle *Paul* did not approve of the errors of the judaizing *Christians*, and yet he knew them to be in an error, and, indeed, an error of no small importance, when consider'd in it's full extent; he knew, I say, the *Jews* were in the wrong, and the *Gentiles* in the right, and yet he expressly requires both to receive each other, but not to doubtful disputations; and he particularly charges them not to judge or condemn one another because of their differences. Was he therefore an accessory to, or a partaker with them in their errors? Who dare say it? — As to what's alledg'd, that the receiving an erroneous person into communion would be a means to harden him in his error, because (I suppose) of the countenance thereby given to him: I think the direct contrary may safely be affirm'd. While men are continued within the pale of the church they are in a way of being better instructed, and may come in time to be convinc'd they were in the wrong; for God's revealing of which unto them, I think it is clearly enough imply'd in the apostle's doctrine, that we ought patiently to wait: But by casting them out, they are driven to set up separate societies and assemblies, and by that means have an opportunity to strengthen each others hands, in maintaining and propagating their errors.



Another argument in defence of unscriptural impositions is borrowed from the supposed power and authority of the church, which some are for extending even to matters of *Christian* faith; how consistently with protestant principles I leave the world to judge. But be that as it will, the thing pleaded for is this—The church, say they, like all other societies, has a natural right to make such regulations and rules, as to them seem most convenient and fitting, particularly, for preserving purity of faith, and order, and uniformity among themselves; to which regulations and rules all the members of such society are bound, even in *foro conscientiae*, to conform themselves; and if any one should seek to be admitted to their communion, he must beforehand declare his assent and consent to them, otherwise he is not to take it ill; he is not to look upon himself as unjustly or injuriously treated, if he should not be admitted; because, say they, he knowing beforehand the terms we insist on, it is he himself, by his not complying, and not we, who exclude him. This, 'tis true, is sometimes carried no farther than ministerial; yet, in some instances, it has been made to extend to *Christian* communion too. In effect, they amount to one and the same thing. Men have no more right to exclude, or cast out a man from the ministry, who, according to the laws of the gospel, is qualified for it, than they have to exclude, or cast out, a private *Christian*, who, according to the same laws, is qualified for *Christian* communion.

Now in answer to this objection, I have a few things to say. — There is a great difference between civil and religious societies. God has given the first a power of making such rules and laws as they shall judge necessary to preserve publick peace, and promote publick good; unto which laws, provided they do not intrench on the rights of conscience, subjects are bound to submit, not for  
 wrath,

wrath, but for conscience sake. But unto the *Christian* church, consider'd as such, no such right or power has been at all committed. *Christ* alone is king and law-giver here, and unto his laws, and no other, all his subjects, as such, every where, and in all things, are bound to subject themselves. They cannot be amended, alter'd, or added unto by any upon earth; insomuch that, if it were possible for the whole catholick church to meet together in one assembly, they would not have a right to repeal any one law of his, or to make one law of their own that would have a proper authoritative binding force on any of his subjects. And if even the catholick church has no such power, it seems to be utterly incomprehensible how any particular national church can lay claim to it; or by virtue of what warrant they can take upon them to set up a peculium in *Christ's* kingdom, and make arbitrary inclosures about it, commonly called establishments, by which any of *Christ's* faithful servants, in whatever place of the world they are, would be excluded from their communion, if they at any time should demand it. If this be not to erect *imperium in imperio*, it cannot be said what is. How, I pray, would it be look'd upon, if a single parochial church, suppose in *England*, or any where else, should take it in their heads to form an establishment for themselves, by framing a new set of articles, a new liturgy, and, for preserving decency and order, a new set of significant ceremonies, and, to secure all, put in for a new act of uniformity, whereby all, who refuse their assent and consent to these things, might, by law, be excluded from communion, and have other penalties enacted against them? How, I say, would this appear in the eyes of the world? And yet in truth and reality, any parochial church has as good a right to act such a part with respect to a national church as any national church has to act the same, or a like part, with respect

respect to the church universal. Nay I was going to say the odds is on the side of the parochial church; for that is a society founded on a divine institution, which the other has no pretensions to; and therefore if there be a proper legislative authority lodg'd any where, one would think it should be with the former rather than the latter.

I proceed now to make some improvement of what you have heard, which shall be short, because I fear your patience has been already too much trespass'd upon. I hope you are by this time fully convinc'd of the truth and importance of the doctrine which has been deliver'd. Namely ——— That it is by the laws of Christ, and not the commandments of men, not any of theirs, at least, that are either contrary to, or beside and alien from his, that *Christians*, as such, ought to conduct themselves, and especially with respect to the terms of *Christian* communion to be observ'd among them. ——— That Christ's body is one, and he has given us one law or rule to walk by, abundantly sufficient to preserve union and concord in that body. ——— And that, on the other hand, when men depart from this one rule, and take upon them, either thro' ignorance or arrogance, to obtrude their own dictates, or their own interpretation of scripture, upon their fellow *Christians*; or, in a word, if they will insist on any terms of communion whatsoever, which are distinct and different from those already fix'd by our common lord and master; strife and contention always were, and ever will be, the unavoidable consequences: for which this one obvious reason, among others, may be given. ——— That while there are men who have a relish of, and a value for, *Christian* liberty, while there are those who read the bible without prejudice or partiality, there will be men to stand up for the kingly power of the lord Jesus Christ, and his sole right to  
make



make laws obligatory on the consciences of his subjects ; and who, in consequence of this principle, must and will withstand all human inventions and impositions in matters of religion.

These things I have mention'd here again, because I would gladly, in the conclusion, leave you, if I could, under a thorough conviction of their truth, as being perswaded, that a conscientious stedfast adherence to them would, in conjunction with *Christian* charity, be an effectual means to keep us from being involv'd in the guilt of the many scandalous schisms, and divisions which abound in the present age.

Our lot indeed has been cast in days of no small distraction and confusion. Numberless contending factions have from time to time sprung up, and still subsist in the *Christian* church, by whom counsel has been exceedingly darkened with words, especially by the introduction of an infinite variety of technical terms into the *Christian* theology, by which the purity and simplicity of the gospel have been greatly obscur'd, and it's doctrines have been represented in such different and contrary lights, that it is not easy oftentimes, even for honest minds, to determine what course to take. What happen'd in the beginning, when every one said, I am of *Paul*, I of *Appollos*, and I of *Cephas*, has often fallen out since, so that even in our time, whole societies are every where to be met with, saying (who is there does it not ?) we are of *Luther*, we of *Calvin*, we are episcopals, we are presbyterians, independents, anabaptists, and so on. — May it not be said to such, as the Apostle *Paul* did before us, is Christ divided ? Was *Calvin* crucified for you ? or were ye baptised in his name ? Away with all such discriminating party names. It was never well with the church since they were first introduc'd. The name of *Christians* is the most ancient, and, I think, the most honourable

ourable by which the followers of Christ came to be distinguish'd from others; and it were greatly to be wish'd there was no room left for any other to denominate and distinguish them by still. Who I pray was *Luther*, or who was *Calvin*? To say the best of them, they were but ministers, fallible uninspired ministers, by whom some were brought to believe. But certainly neither they, nor any such as they (how great and learned and holy soever) are, or ought to be, lords of our faith; neither their doctrine, nor the doctrine of any such, farther than we find it agreeable to the holy scriptures, is, or should be, a rule to us. We have all but one master, Jesus Christ the lord, and that name should never be given by us to any in heaven or in earth but himself. He has given us a more sure word of prophecy, than any words of man's devising, to trust to, and thereunto we shall do well to take heed, as unto a light which shineth in a dark place. The rule or law which he hath left behind him should be to us, to us protestants at least, I do not say the chief, but our only rule. To that law and testimony all our appeals should be made, being assur'd, that if men speak not according to that word it is because there is no light in them. 'It is the bible, as a great man of the last age said, the bible, and that alone, which is the religion of protestant's; I will add, and ought to be of all *Christians*.' For the faith therein deliver'd let us boldly stand up, let us zealously and earnestly contend, and thereunto let us steadfastly and constantly adhere. To as many as walk by this rule may grace and mercy be daily multiplied: but if in any thing any sincere *Christians* are otherwise minded, let us not on that account reject them, but let us wait with patience till they be otherwise convinc'd, believing that God, in his good time, will reveal that also unto them.